DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 469 RC 023 363

AUTHOR Copus, Andrew; Petrie, Scott; Shucksmith, Janet; Shucksmith, Mark; Still, Margaret; Watt, Joyce

TITLE Pre-School Educational Provision in Rural Areas. Interchange 69.

INSTITUTION Scottish Executive Education Dept., Edinburgh.
ISSN ISSN-0969-613X
PUB DATE 2001-08-00
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/ic69.pdf.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; *Educational Needs; Educational Policy; *Educational Practices; Foreign Countries; Geographic Isolation; Parent Attitudes; *Preschool Education; Public Education; Rural Areas; *Rural Education; Rural Population
IDENTIFIERS *Scotland

ABSTRACT

The Scottish Executive Education Department has pledged to achieve universal provision of preschool education for 3- and 4-year-olds, whose parents want it, by 2002. The particular factors affecting delivery of preschool education in rural areas were examined through telephone interviews with local education authorities and voluntary preschool providers in rural areas and through five detailed case studies. A preliminary exercise--a detailed mapping of Scotland's rural population--found that 29 percent of Scotland's population was rural, but 88 percent of rural people lived in areas adjacent to urban centers. The proportion of preschool children in rural areas was similar to overall figures, except in remote areas, which had only half the expected number of preschool children. A gap was found between numbers of eligible preschool children and provision of preschool places in rural areas. Choices similar to those in urban areas were found only in rural adjacent areas. Shortages of qualified teachers or nursery nurses, higher costs for smaller groups, and transportation problems were among the difficulties encountered. Provision of preschool education by local authorities varied widely in terms of practices, principles, and priorities. There were very different views about acceptable travel distances and staffing, and some authorities developed innovative solutions concerning scheduling, facilities, and transportation. The findings raise policy issues related to social inclusion goals, parental choice and involvement, and the definition of "quality." Recommendations are presented to the Scottish Executive and local authorities. (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 461 469

Interchange 69

Pre-School Ed

RC 023363

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Mackenzie

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Why **Interchange?**

Research cannot make the decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education in our schools and colleges. Nor can it by itself bring about change. However, it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

It is important that every opportunity should be taken to communicate research findings, both inside and outside the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). Moreover, if research is to have the greatest possible impact on policy and practice, the findings need to be presented in an accessible, interesting and attractive form to policy makers, teachers, lecturers, parents and employers.

Interchange aims to further improve the Education Department Research Unit's dissemination of the findings of research funded by SEED. We hope you will find that **Interchange** is long enough to give the flavour of the complexities, subtleties and limitations of a research study but concise enough to give a good feeling for the findings and in some cases to encourage you to obtain the full report.

The views expressed in this **Interchange** are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Scottish Executive or any other organisation(s) by whom the author(s) is are employed.

Copyright © August 2001, Scottish Executive Education Department
ISSN 0969-613X

Interchange may be photocopied for use within your own institution.

A limited number of additional copies can be obtained by writing to the SEED Research Unit Dissemination Officer at the Scottish Executive Education Department, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ. File copies for electronic downloading are available on the the Scottish Executive server (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/hmis/edru.asp).

Pre-School Educational Provision in Rural Areas

Andrew Copus[1], Scott Petrie[1], Janet Shucksmith[2], Mark Shucksmith[3], Margaret Still[2] and Joyce Watt[2]

Introduction

This study arose from the Scottish Executive's pledge to achieve universal provision of pre-school education for 3 and 4 year olds, whose parents want it, by 2002. Funding for this is given to local authorities, who are expected, at their discretion but with strong encouragement from Government, to work in partnership with voluntary and private sectors. The University of Aberdeen, with the Scottish Agricultural College, was commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department to establish the particular factors in rural areas involved in delivering this commitment. The fieldwork was conducted between October 1998 and June 1999. Since then the numbers of 3 and 4 year olds attending grant-funded pre-school education have risen significantly – even in remote rural areas.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to establish the particular factors in rural areas in delivering the Scottish Executive pledge of universal provision of pre-school education for 3 and 4 year olds.

Objectives of the Study

Specific objectives were to:

- produce a simple definition of rural Scotland and create an appropriate typology of rural areas which would facilitate the selection of areas for case study
- identify and map the existing distribution of pre-school educational provision and
- establish the spatial distribution of pre-school children in Scotland
- model existing catchment areas
- establish the determinants of current 'travel to nursery' pattern
- estimate the size and distribution of demand for pre-school provision for 4-year-olds and 3-year-olds in rural Scotland
- explore the preferences of parents and providers with regard to local forms of provision
- identify patterns of inter-departmental and cross-sectional collaboration which promote the provision and quality of pre-school education in rural areas.

1 Rural Policy Group, Scottish Agricultural College, Aberdeen
2 Centre for Educational Research on Rural Development, University of Aberdeen
3 Arkleton Centre for Research on Rural Development, University of Aberdeen

Outline

Methodology

In order to assess how many authorities, parents and pre-school children were affected by the particular circumstances of rural areas, a detailed mapping and modelling exercise was undertaken. Using the GRO rural/urban classification, rural areas were defined as areas outside settlements of 10,000 inhabitants since this allowed smaller settlements which play an important role in rural pre-school provision to be included. According to this definition, in Scotland as a whole 29.3% of the population live in rural areas. This proportion varies between councils from 0% in Glasgow to 100% in the island areas. More than half Scotland's councils have at least a third of their population living in rural areas, but relatively few live far from an urban area. This diversity of rural Scotland is notable.

For a closer examination of this, rural Scotland was divided into three broad types of zones: those which were adjacent to urban areas of sufficient population to support a pre-school centre (88% of the rural population); those which were intermediate and between 2 to 15 miles from urban areas (11% of the rural population); and those which were remote and more than 15 miles from urban areas (1% of the rural population). Scotland's four year-olds were distributed in proportion to the overall population, except in the remote zone, which has only half the expected number of pre-school children and relatively greater numbers of older people.

Alongside this analysis of available statistics, a range of qualitative techniques was also used to deepen understanding of these issues. Telephone interviews were conducted with local authority officers and representatives of voluntary and private providers throughout rural Scotland to identify the range of ways in which pre-school education is organised and to raise issues for in-depth study. This information was elaborated further through five detailed case studies of areas (Aberdeenshire, Highland, Stirling, Dumfries and Galloway, and the Western Isles), selected by means of a rural typology. This ensured that the case study areas covered as wide a range of circumstances as possible, geographical contexts, types of provision and parents' and providers' perspectives on pre-school education. The fieldwork was undertaken between October 1998 and June 1999.

Main Findings

Publicly funded educational provision for pre-school children in most of rural Scotland has always been limited, and the pattern has been different to that in most urban areas. The reasons are not hard to find. Pre-school education has never been a statutory service so until very recently it has flourished mainly in traditionally Labour dominated urban areas where it has been part of the battle against educational and economic disadvantage. That legacy is still to some extent with us. Because of this, in most rural areas the gap has been plugged since the 1960s by the voluntary sector, mainly the pre-school playgroup movement. During the 1990s there was a slow but significant change, with

government funding in 1991 to six voluntary organisations to support pre-school work in rural areas and, at the same time, a number of local authorities began to experiment with innovative schemes aimed at taking pre-school education to more children in rural areas. After the introduction of the Voucher Scheme in 1996, the following year the Labour Government announced its own proposals. Unlike the voucher scheme, the new initiative guaranteed a part-time place to every child in Scotland in his/her pre-school year, if parents wanted it, and the Scottish Executive, in its Programme for Government, set the goal of universal provision by 2002.

In recognition of the particular needs of rural areas the Government, in March 1998, announced its Rural Pre-school Supplementary Grant Award of £4m to 24 Scottish local authorities with substantial rural areas. This was increased to £5.8m in February 1999 for session 1999-2000, full funding going to 12 predominantly rural authorities with transitional funding to nine others. This grant has been used in a variety of ways, described in the main report, to plug gaps in existing rural provision and to fund new initiatives. Further measures have been introduced since then, of course, but these could not be considered in the research and are therefore not discussed in this Interchange.

Provision of Pre-School Places.

- The study identified a gap between the numbers of eligible pre-school children and the provision of pre-school places in rural areas. This gap became systematically greater with remoteness. In school catchments in remote zones the number of funded pre-school places was less than 50% of the estimated number of 4-year olds, with only 843 places for 1,757 children. The comparable figure for Scotland as a whole, at the time of the fieldwork, was 88%.

- It was only in zones adjacent to urban areas that children had similar choices to those who lived in urban areas as long as a journey of up to 2 miles was considered acceptable. In remote areas there was no choice of pre-school place especially where families were scattered in small communities across a wide area. In such cases it was not possible for parents to access a pre-school place in their own community and some had to travel lengthy distances in order to access any provision.

- The more remote the area, the smaller the size of pre-school groups tended to be and the more difficult it was to staff with qualified teachers or nursery nurses. Resource and premises costs also increased as groups became smaller. These factors exacerbated many of the educational, social and financial costs, and making full-service flexible options or teacher input non-viable.

- In remote areas, personal transport was seen as essential irrespective of the cost involved and therefore travelling distances to the nearest pre-school place did not raise practical problems. In contrast, for families in intermediate areas, where parents could access a shop or primary school without the use of transport, personal transport was not considered essential. Travelling distances to a pre-school group did raise practical problems for these families as they had neither access to personal transport nor did they have reliable public transport which they could

use to reach the nearest pre-school group. Moreover, some children may not have been able to attend because of clashes of nursery times with older siblings' school times and parents' employment.

Policies and Practices of Local Authorities.

The telephone interviews with local authority officers and representatives of voluntary and private providers revealed both a rapidly changing situation and a huge variation in the practices of local authorities across rural Scotland. Existing pre-school education in rural areas is the result of history, parental preferences, perceptions of 'quality' and expediency. This richness and variety was elaborated further through five case studies of areas, selected by means of a rural typology. This identified five 'challenge' bands according to factors representing likely social disadvantage and guided the choice of the case study areas to cover as wide a range of circumstances as possible. The study found:

- There were marked differences between local authorities both in their actions and in the principles and priorities guiding these. There were very different views, for example, about issues such as acceptable travel distance and staffing, and in the ways in which authorities interpreted Government guidelines. It was unclear how far these variations were a legitimate reflection of different local circumstances, needs and priorities.
- Overall, while direct provision by local authorities is much lower than in urban Scotland, a few authorities had a long tradition of providing nursery education in rural areas. In 1998 almost all authorities increased their own provision in rural areas.
- Direct provision by local authorities in areas with small numbers of pre-school children (fewer than 20 which is the traditional size of a nursery class) living in scattered locations needed to be innovative because of the challenge to be cost effective. The sorts of innovative, new arrangements put in place included:
  - opening new local authority centres to serve several communities (sometimes from adjacent authorities) and expecting children to travel to these;
  - providing peripatetic outreach for a few sessions;
  - offering equivalent whole-day provision for children who had to travel long distances, with flexible use of staffing for lunch time cover ;
  - developing multi-function centres for all under-5s with flexible hours and provision, addressing a wide range of needs alongside education for 4-year-olds;
  - funding minibuses or taxis, with children escorted by parents or others;
  - sharing premises between local authority and voluntary groups at different times.

Another less satisfactory solution was simply to cater for pre-school children within the local composite primary class. The principal issues raised relate to the size of group, transport and travel for such young children, and diversity and flexibility in staffing.

Discussion

These findings raise issues of social inclusion, of choice, and of quality and flexibility.

Social Inclusion

- Pre-school education is a powerful weapon in the fight against social exclusion, but higher per capita costs in rural areas, as well as the availability and cost of transport are major problems.
- In addition, working parents in rural areas face considerable difficulty in accessing their full entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds while also continuing their own engagement in the labour market (a central pillar of welfare reform). It is ironic that attempts to improve inclusion amongst pre-schoolers may often inadvertently exclude their parents from full participation. In some areas this problem was being tackled with the provision of pre-school facilities embedded in wrap-around care arrangements and such coordinated, cross-cutting approaches are essential to 'joined-up' strategies for social inclusion.
- There is a strong argument for local authorities with large rural areas to continue to receive additional financial support from central government. Within local authorities, consideration needs to be given to the allocation of resources to the most vulnerable.

Choice and Parental Involvement

- Another central finding is that planning for pre-school education must consult and allow for parental preference and choice if it is to be effective.
- Such involvement and choice is prized highly by parents, and again this may be more difficult to achieve in rural areas – choice and flexibility require resources, not just of money but of imagination and commitment to take parents' wishes seriously.
- Choice for some in areas of low population can diminish that for others, as is already well-known in areas where Gaelic is widely spoken. For example, the introduction of more centralised pre-school facilities with care arrangements, crucial to some parents, may diminish choice if the local village playgroup is forced to close as a result.

Issues of Quality

- There was little agreement among parents and providers on the concept of quality in rural areas. Local authority providers and primary schools

emphasised the benefits of qualified teachers and nursery nurses. Some parents saw the involvement of teachers as a benchmark of quality, fearing that rural children might be allocated a 'second-class' service, bereft of teachers, because of the need to cut costs. Other parents, though, valued the commitment and enthusiasm of volunteers above teaching qualifications. They saw the direct benefits of parent engagement in terms of rural capacity-building, in reducing isolation and maintaining community cohesion. Defining quality is, by its nature, a political process, and this reinforces the need to consult those for whom the provision is intended.

- There is an interdependence of quality for children, families and communities (especially where alternatives are limited) which requires the continuing re-negotiation of needs, definitions of quality, and of appropriate provision. Parents, providers and local authorities face major decisions not only over employment or non-employment of teachers, but also relating to finding, training and retraining staff at all levels, and forms and locations of provision.

- Low population numbers and fragile rural economies produce fluctuating situations from year to year. For this reason local authorities have little option but to keep the situation under review, while at the same time ensuring continuity as far as possible.

- One of the markers of quality for parents in many rural areas was the coherence and continuity of the educational experience for their children. It was highly important to them that the provision of pre-school places of appropriate quality is achieved in a way which allows children to experience the pre-school to primary school transition without major shunts of peer group and location.

Provider-led or consumer-led?

The immediate drive to meet policy deadlines for the expansion of pre-school education has inevitably fostered in many areas a provider-led system. If the sector is going to retain the confidence of parents and enhance the satisfaction and positive educational outcomes for children, then we must look now to a system that pays more attention to consumer need. We hope that the findings of this study go some way towards revealing the specific agendas of all parties involved in the provision and consumption of pre-school education (though, regrettably, not the pre-schoolers themselves). In addition we hope that the many examples of innovative thinking and practice revealed in the full report will stimulate debate and offer local authorities and central government ways forward to improve the system. The necessity for thinking through these issues is clearly an opportunity as well as a burden. The development of a responsive public service committed to providing a quality educational experience in the context of promoting inclusion for all would set an example in the rural areas which would leave rural education leading the way, rather than lagging behind.

Recommendations to the Scottish Executive

- At the time the research was conducted, a gap was identified between the numbers of eligible children and the provision of places in remote areas and the difficulties of access in intermediate areas. Together with the higher costs involved in rural provision, this led to the conclusion that continuing additional funding for pre-school provision in remote and intermediate areas was necessary.
- The Scottish Executive should, in partnership with local authorities, help to monitor, evaluate and disseminate existing examples of innovative and imaginative practice to providers and parents.
- The Scottish Executive should urge COSLA to hold a national conference for local authorities, partner provider organisations and parents, with the purpose of sharing experiences and broadening awareness of options.
- The interdependence of the financial, social and educational aspects of pre-school education in rural Scotland necessitates a 'joined-up' response from government, and the development of appropriate structures to prepare and deliver an integrated strategy.
- Transport and travel difficulties are central to issues of social inclusion, choice and flexibility in the provision of pre-school education in rural areas. Discussions are required with local authorities to address this issue in terms of developing and funding innovative and flexible policies.

Recommendations to local authorities

- Variations in the cost of pre-school provision necessitate differential funding across their area from local authorities, with additional resources for intermediate and remoter areas.
- Mutually supportive relationships are vital between local authorities on the one hand and the national bodies of voluntary and private providers and their local representatives.
- Local authorities should make every effort to involve parents and partners, both in deciding what constitutes quality pre-school education, and in determining strategies and practices. Consultation, flexibility and choice are integral to definitions of quality.
- There is an urgent need for local authorities to be more innovative and imaginative in delivering pre-school education in rural areas, and especially to be aware of the diversity of current practices, and to learn from one another's experiences. The provision of pre-school education must be suited to local circumstances, such as remoteness, low incomes and sparsity of population, and it is the local authority which must identify these local aspects and consider with parents and providers how best to adapt models of provision accordingly. Local authorities should

work with COSLA and the Scottish Executive to organise opportunities and strategies for sharing experience and good practice.

- Local authorities should seek to develop innovative and imaginative transport practices which will promote social inclusion and choice in accessing pre-school education.
- Pre-school education must be linked to primary education. This requires administrative co-ordination for the convenience of families and to ease the transition for children. It requires a common commitment to a curriculum and a philosophy which sees pre-school education as both important in its own right and as a preparation for primary school.
- The interdependencies of financial, social and educational aspects require local authorities to develop cross-cutting structures which will enable 'joined-up' practice. Such structures might include social inclusion partnerships and community planning.

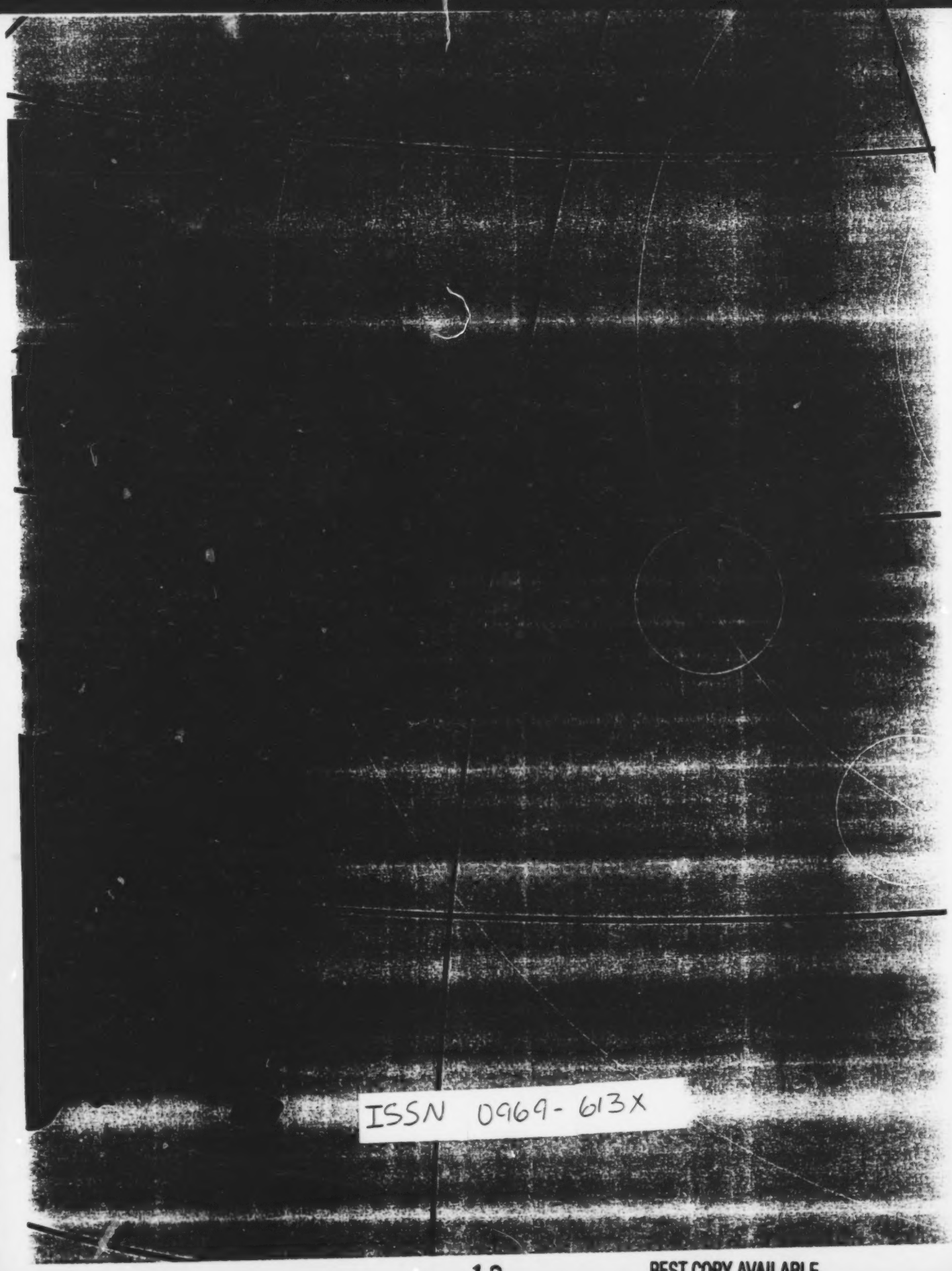
The full report, *Pre-School Educational Provision in Rural Areas*, is available from the Arkleton Centre for Rural Development Research, University of Aberdeen, St Mary's, Old Aberdeen, AB24 3UF. Details may be obtained from Rona Kennedy on 01224 273901 or from www.abdn.ac.uk/arkleton

1. *Homework Policy and Practice*
2. *School to Higher Education: Bridging the Gap*
3. *Teaching, Learning and Assessment in the National Certificate*
4. *Developing School Managers*
5. *Transition from School to Adulthood of Young People with Recorded Special Educational Needs*
6. *Discipline in Scottish Schools*
7. *Training the Trainers' Programmes. Effective Management and Monitoring*
8. *Introduction of the New Further Education College Council System*
9. *Young People's Experience of National Certificate Modules*
10. *Costs and Benefits of Adult Basic Education*
11. *Performance Indicators and Examination Results*
12. *An Evaluation of the Advanced Courses Development Programme*
13. *Staying the Course*
14. *A Study of Probationer Teachers*
15. *Making School Boards Work*
16. *Professional Development through Research*
17. *Students' Views on SWAP*
18. *Specific Learning Difficulties: Policy, Practice and Provision*
19. *Foreign Languages in Primary Schools: the National Pilot Projects in Scotland*
20. *Towards More School Based Training?*
21. *Patterns of Attainment in Standard Grade Mathematics 3–6*
22. *Patterns of Attainment in Standard Grade English 3–6*
23. *Implementing 5–14: a Progress Report*
24. *Education–Business Links: Patterns of Partnership*
25. *Foreign Languages for Vocational Purposes in Further and Higher Education*
26. *School for Skills*
27. *Effective Support for Learning: Themes from the RAISE Project*
28. *Marketing Means Business*
29. *Adult Education: Participation, Guidance and Progression*
30. *Studies of Differentiation Practices in Primary and Secondary Schools*
31. *Health Education: What Do Young People Want to Know?*
32. *Social and Educational Services for Children Under Five*
33. *Issues in Teachers' Continuing Professional Development*
34. *Primary Teachers' Understanding of Concepts in Science and Technology*
35. *Putting 5-14 in Place: An Overview of the Methods and Findings of the Evaluation 1991-95*
36. *Implementing 5-14 in Primary Schools*
37. *Implementing 5-14 in Secondary Schools*
38. *Provision for Special Educational Needs*
39. *Methods of Teaching Reading*
40. *Criteria for Opening Records of Needs*
41. *Guidance in Secondary Schools*
42. *Higher Grade Examination Performance (1987-1994)*
43. *Pupils with Special Educational Needs: The Role of Speech & Language Therapists*
44. *Evaluation of the National Record of Achievement in Scotland*
45. *Part-time Higher Education in Scotland*
46. *Educational Provision for Children with Autism in Scotland*
47. *Exclusions and In-school Alternatives*
48. *Devolved School Management*
49. *Implementing 5-14 in Primary and Secondary Schools: 'Steady Development'*
50. *Early Intervention: Key Issues from Research*
51. *Youth Work with Vulnerable Young People*
52. *Evaluation of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) Extension*
53. *Cost of Pre-School Education Provision*
54. *Managing Change in Small Primary Schools*
55. *Baseline Assessment Literature Review and Pre-School Record Keeping in Scotland*
56. *Schools and Community Education for the Learning Age*
57. *Accelerating Reading Attainment: The Effectiveness of Synthetic Phonics*
58. *Teachers' ICT Skills and Knowledge Needs*
59. *Foreign Languages in the Upper Secondary School: A Study of the Causes of Decline*
60. *Practices and Interactions in the Primary Classroom*
61. *Providing Drug Education to Meet Young People's Needs*
62. *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic-medium Primary Education in Scotland*
63. *The Impact of Information and Communications Technology Initiatives*
64. *Parents' Demand for Childcare in Scotland*
65. *Uptake and Perceptions of Early-year's Qualifications*
66. *Developments in Inclusive Schooling*
67. *Raising Attainment of Pupils in Special Schools*
68. *All Day Provision for 3 and 4 Year Olds*
69. *Pre-school Educational Provision in Rural Areas*
70. *Gender and Pupil Performance*

Further information

If you have views on **Interchange** and/or wish to find out more about SEED s research programme, contact the SEED Research Unit, The Scottish Executive Education Department, Room 1B Dockside, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



ISSN 0969-613X

BEST COPY AVAILABLE